REVIEW ESSAYS

Where Is Victorian Ecocriticism?
Jesse Oak Taylor

On Print Culture: Mediation, Practice, Politics, Knowledge
Barbara Leckie

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WHERE IS VICTORIAN ECOCRITICISM?

By Jesse Oak Taylor

THE MOST STRIKING THING about reviewing the field of Victorian ecocriticism is that there is so little of it. This relative absence is all the more perplexing given that ecocritical work on Romanticism and nineteenth-century American literature is so profuse. Thoreau and Wordsworth remain the most-discussed authors in a field that was in many respects inaugurated by Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology*: *Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) and Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture* (1995). Romanticism remains the point of departure for some of the most influential studies in the field, including those like Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature* (2009) that challenge many of its core precepts. Meanwhile, ecocriticism has expanded to include many other periods and regions, with collections ranging from *The Ecocritical Shakespeare* (2011) to *Postcolonial Ecologies* (2011), and unsurprisingly, a strong turn toward the contemporary.

So where are the Victorians? How is it that, until relatively recently, ecocritics and Victorianists have largely managed to ignore one another?[1] More importantly, what distinctive contributions can Victorian studies make to the field of ecocriticism, and vice versa? Victorian studies can make crucial contributions to ecocriticial thinking (as the books discussed below indicate), in part precisely by correcting for some of the acknowledged gaps and oversights for which so-called "first wave" ecocriticism has been criticized: the celebration of a de-historicized "Nature," idealizing wilderness rather than engaging with urban environments, uncritical and often largely metaphorical absorption of scientific terminology, inadequate attention to race and empire, and, I would add, a fixation on essences and abstractions rather than the dimensions of scale. Victorian ecocriticism is likely to correct for many of these oversights, with greater attention to the city, empire, institutions, and a rich body of scholarship on the two way street between science and literature. The prominence of the realist novel in both the Victorian era and scholarship regarding it is particularly conducive to many of these shifts, especially in helping us attend to the banality of the Anthropocene – the way that ecological crisis is wrought out of the accumulated trivial acts of everyday life.

One of the central disjunctures between Victorian studies and ecocriticism arises around the issue of presentism, the anachronistic mapping of present concerns or ideas onto the artifacts of the past. Victorian studies is, to its credit, a historically rigorous field and thus has been understandably leery of presentism. Many ecocritics, on the other hand, have embraced what Dan Brayton calls "strategic presentism," which not only brings subsequent scientific

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understanding of ecology and the environmental implications of historical processes to bear on the materials from earlier periods (in Brayton's case, Shakespeare), but also attempts to mobilize those readings in relation to the ecological crises of the present (*Shakespeare's Ocean* 5). There are several reasons why a presentist orientation makes sense for an ecocriticism: ecological change usually happens much more slowly than historical change so that periods must be reconsidered against the backdrop of deep time, which has the almost inevitable result of smoothing out some of the historical distinctions that appear within a narrower view, while the ecological processes, organisms, or rock strata remain much the same across the more familiar periods of human history. Whereas simplistic presentism simply reads the past as though it were the present, strategic presentism defamiliarizes the present by way of the alterity of the past. Done carelessly, presentist analysis voids its own contribution, but done with careful attention to both the historical archive and the contemporary moment, strategic presentism has great potential to enrich both and in so doing, to affirm the value and urgency of humanistic inquiry more broadly. Victorian studies (and indeed any historical scholarship) is beneficial not in spite of the gap between the critic and the object of study, but because of it: it is the weirdness of the Victorians that makes them fascinating. At the same time, ecological timescales render the historical gap between the Victorians and ourselves much smaller, placing us both within shared frames such as "industrial capitalism," or the "fossil fuel era." This is particularly acute in relation to the Anthropocene, a new geologic age defined by human action, which is most often dated to the Industrial Revolution.[2]

If the Anthropocene was invented in the late eighteenth century, then the Victorians were its first inhabitants. If the geologic agency of the human emerged alongside the idea of "Nature" within Romanticism (and as part of the same historical processes), then the Victorians were the first people to dwell within it as a condition of their existence, witnessing the radical transformation of the world and of the conditions of possibility within it. In this regard, it is perhaps unsurprising how many of the imaginative challenges of the Anthropocene are eerily familiar from the Victorian era. Reimagining human being as species being (the term used by the young Marx to articulate that aspect of our innate being from which we are alienated under capital) lies at the heart of both evolutionary theory and much of Victorian political economy. One of the reasons for not accepting the geological and climatological agency of humanity, meanwhile, is because we have become so accustomed to thinking of ecological change as unimaginably slow. We have come to take comfort in the very depths of time that terrified the Victorians. Indeed, many popular works of environmental nonfiction employ casts familiar to Victorianists. David Quammen's *The Song of the Dodo*, includes a lengthy chapter on Alfred Russell Wallace. Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction* returns to Charles Lyell and opposition between "uniformitarianism" and "catastrophism" in understanding geological change, arguing that Lyell's uniformitarianism has become a hindrance to acknowledging the dawn of the Anthropocene. These connections point both to the relevance of Victorian ecocriticism, and to the need for it. For example, Adelene Buckland's wonderful *Novel Science: Fiction and the Invention of Nineteenth-Century Geology* complicates received notions of the "uniformitarian/catastrophist" debate that Kolbert invokes. That richer picture of the debates and intellectual challenges of the period and the role played by literature in conceiving and conveying scientific understanding has the potential to be extremely relevant to contemporary debates. Buckland's deeply learned and engaging book is extremely helpful in this regard, or at least it has the potential to be: the

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term "Anthropocene" does not appear in its pages. Thus, the book does not attempt to speak directly to the contemporary context where its insights are urgently needed. Any discussion of nineteenth-century geology taking place in the twenty-first century is, I would argue, at least in part a conversation about the origins of the Anthropocene. Strategic presentism would render those connections explicit.

Another explanation for the dearth of explicitly ecocritical work in Victorian studies is that Victorianists have been doing a form of ecocriticism without using the term, and indeed have furthermore been doing so for far longer than "ecocriticism" has existed as a field. Studies of industrialization, enclosure, and the relationship between literature and science in the period all have direct bearing on ecocritical concerns. For example, Elaine Freedgood's analysis of things in Victorian fiction, especially the mahogany furniture in *Jane Eyre*, reveals deforestation to be a pervasive (and constitutive) feature of imperial modernity. Isobel Armstrong's deep investigation of Victorian glass encapsulates labor, raw material, and industrial processes. Neither specifically frames this discussion in terms of either the ecocritical literature or contemporary environmental concerns, and yet both studies might be dubbed ecocriticism by another name. In recent years, there has been an upsurge in explicit Victorian ecocriticism, however, with panels at NAVSA and MLA, and the recent INCS conference on "Energy" at which prominent eco-theorist Timothy Morton delivered a keynote (forthcoming in *Nineteenth Century Contexts* as "Victorian Hyperobjects"). Articles such as Justine Pizzo's stimulating discussion of ether and atmospheric character in *Bleak House*, my own treatment of the same novel as a "climate model," Susan David Bernstein's treatment of Amy Levy's "recycling" poetics, and William A. Cohen's analysis of tactile arborialities in *The Woodlanders* all bespeak an ecological turn in Victorian studies. In the remainder of this essay, I will illustrate the strengths of this movement by way of several recent monographs in the field.

The vast majority of ecocriticism on the nineteenth century focuses on Romanticism, and ecocritical treatment of Victorian authors has often emerged as an outgrowth or offshoot of Romantic ecocriticism. For example, Jonathan Bate writes of Thomas Hardy that "he values a world – for him vanishing, for us long vanished – in which people *live in rhythm with nature*," thus framing Hardy in terms of the end of a distinctly Romantic idea of "nature" (3). Scott Hess's *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship* offers an extended critique of Bate and indeed of Romantic ecocriticism as a whole. In particular, Hess takes issue with the idea of using Wordsworth as a model for ecological citizenship, noting that the "Wordsworthian ecocritics version of "nature"... turns out to express a very specific version of culture" (6). Whereas (Bate most prominently) have looked to Wordsworth as a model for ecological poetics, ideas of nature, and modes of environmental activism, Hess counters that "Wordsworth's own construction of 'nature' was primarily cultural and aesthetic, not ecological, and to approach him in ecological terms without taking into account these specific historical contexts tends to distort his positions unhelpfully" (11). This critique opens a distinction between strategic presentism and what we might call naïve or vulgar presentism, which simply reads past debates in terms of subsequent ideas and motivations (though Bate's book is both more nuanced and more historically rooted than Hess's critique suggests). As Hess shows, reading Wordsworth as an environmentalist in the contemporary sense is anachronistic. On the other hand, reading Wordsworth's version of environmentalism with care and attention to his historical moment in order to intervene in contemporary environmentalist practice is strategic presentism.

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One of Hess's central departures from Bate's version of Wordsworth lies in attending to both the poetry and the nature of everyday life, rather than seeing poetry as a refuge from it. Hess challenges the notion that Wordsworth practices natural observation in contrast to the self-consciously aestheticized landscapes of the picturesque, arguing that Wordsworth's poetry deploys a resolutely visual approach to the landscape that it shares with early nature photography. Hess contrasts this picturesque vision with the embodied, lived habitation and "ecological citizenship" that he finds in both Dorothy Wordsworth and John Clare. As Hess explains, "I want something much more from environmental literature than a refreshing trip to the park. . . . I want instead an imaginative structure that I can inhabit throughout my everyday life and relationships – a literature that will not just celebrate and preserve a few isolated 'natural' enclaves, but will help us redesign the whole city, including our entire lives, economies, and ecologies within it" (18–19). Though Hess doesn't articulate it as such, this call for a turn to the everyday could be taken as a clarion call for ecocritical readings of the realist novel.

While William Wordsworth's vision has been instrumental in framing the creation of national parks and wilderness lands as sites of spiritual fulfillment, Hess argues that "in today's ecological crises, there is nowhere to stand outside the frame" (67). Continuing this trajectory in what I found to be the most fascinating chapter of the book, Hess turns to the construction of the Lake District as "Wordsworth country," especially in the numerous guidebooks that appeared throughout the nineteenth century; this construction corresponds to similar literary landscapes cultivated around Walter Scott, the Brontës, and Thomas Hardy. This analysis is particularly productive because it renders explicit the way that literary texts condition our reading of the world, rather than the other way around. Such guidebooks cultivate a sense of "the Lake District as pure nature and at the same time as haunted by poetic genius" (79). Nominally the source of the poetry, the landscape itself essentially becomes a product of it. The appreciation of such an aesthetic landscape, in turn, comes to depend on particular background, education, and class. The guidebooks themselves fall into a double bind, at once presenting the Lake District to readers while questioning the rights of the uninitiated to be there at all. Hess points out that one guide "makes an only partly tongue-in-cheek proposal for a series of entrance examinations on Wordsworth's works, as a requirement for admission to his house and grounds at Rydal Mount" (81). In an ironic twist, "no quotations from guide books" were to be included on such exams (qtd. on 81).

Hess links this emergence of an explicitly aestheticized appreciation of "Nature" to the rise of the art museum. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's influential articulation of aesthetics as a marker of class, he argues that "what Bourdieu writes about class and museums can be applied almost verbatim to the high-aesthetic construction of nature" (181). As self-appointed arbiter of Victorian taste, admirer of Wordsworth, and resident of the Lake District, John Ruskin emerges as central to this discussion. Hess takes Ruskin to task as an embodiment of the patrician and elitist approach to both aesthetics and nature. He links Ruskin's proposal of "separate art museums for the working classes and for the cultural elite," to Wordsworth and Ruskin's high-profile (but unsuccessful) effort to stop the construction of the Windermere Railway, which has often been celebrated as an early environmental protest (162). However, Hess argues that the opposition was not ecological but aesthetic, and motivated primarily by concern that the railway would transform the Lake District into a site of mass tourism. He furthermore notes that the railway, which now only operates in summer, has come to be a celebrated feature of the self-consciously nostalgic landscape. Ultimately, Hess is

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not so much critiquing Wordsworth the poet as Wordsworth the cultural institution. The real problem arises with a particular strand of Victorian environmentalism that Hess sees most clearly (and problematically) embodied in Ruskin, and with an ecocritical tradition inaugurated by Jonathan Bate. While no one is likely to contest Ruskin's snobbery, further work in Victorian ecocriticism will invariably complicate such an account, rendering a more multiform version of Victorian environmentalism.

Some of these complications are raised by a trip north from the Lake District into the Scottish Highlands in Louisa Gairn's *Ecology and Modern Scottish Literature* (2008). The first half of Gairn's book focuses on the Victorian era, with chapters on the emergence of mountaineering culture in mid-Victorian Scotland, Gaelic poetry, John Muir (who was born in Scotland before moving to Wisconsin at age 8), and Robert Louis Stevenson. Among Gairn's most interesting arguments is her discussion of the effects of mountaineering in light of nineteenth-century physiological theories such as that climbing's physical danger, difficulty, and above all the tactile rigor of hands gripping rock provided "a way of accessing the 'truth' about the natural world — linking action and perception" in ways inaccessible to the walker or viewer (23). While Gairn acknowledges that the mountaineering clubs were predominately middle-class endeavors, comprised of university-educated professionals, they also flouted property rights, bragging of their willingness to trespass into order to attain the peaks they considered the birthright of every Scot, with politics "oriented more toward the popular appropriation of the landscape than the closing off the land by wealthy landowners" (27). Indeed, there were "a number of radicals hidden within the ranks of the Scottish mountaineering community" (28). These dynamics are further complicated by the violence of the Highland Clearances and the squeezing of crofters onto ever narrower and more marginal tracts of land in order to allow greater room for sheep grazing, itself a product of (or more accurately participant in) the processes of industrialization and the rising demand for wool. Gaelic poets and their readers sharply criticized the tendency whereby "the gentleman mountaineer or grouse-shooter's 'love' for the Scottish soil he visited on holiday was lauded as a virtue and praised as a duty fulfilled, whilst the crofting tenant's ancestral sense of connection to the land was regarded as an unsustainable tradition which ought to be discouraged" (26). Thus, both Hess's and Gairn's accounts converge on the point that ideas of nature are always fraught, contested, and crossed with political, social, and economic dimensions. Placing these two accounts next to one another offers a reminder that the Wordsworthian strand in environmental thinking, however influential, is by no means the only place to look for nascent environmental discourse in the Victorian era. Meanwhile, the scope of Gairn's monograph presents another slant on strategic presentism by tracing a genealogy from the Victorian era through contemporary Scottish authors like Kathleen Jamie and John Burnside, widening the scope of the "modern," even as it expands the bounds of the nation through Muir's writing on wilderness in the American west.

Hess's genealogy of Wordsworthian "Nature" as a Victorian construction raises another, more profound, point: that Nature was always construed as an absence or, at best, as endangered, a potential, imminent absence. For both Wordsworth and Ruskin, the Lake District was a refuge from the storm clouds of modernity. After all, the Windermere Railway protest was a losing battle; the locus of cultural and intellectual life had shifted, along with the bulk of the population, from the country to the city. Everyday life in the later nineteenth century looks more like a scene out of Charles Dickens than John Clare. Thus, if "Nature" was in a sense invented in the nineteenth century, it was only invented as an already palpable

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absence, like one of the innumerable dying children in Victorian fiction who enter the text only to impart some token of wisdom or generosity before succumbing to their entirely foreseeable fate, and thus in a sense speak from beyond the grave. I have taken to calling this condition of nature in a state of perpetual withdrawal the *abnatural*, and it is everywhere apparent in Victorian literature.

For the Victorians, "Nature" (capitalized or otherwise) was far stranger and more frightening than self-consciously nostalgic accounts let on, as the period's most famous articulation makes explicit: "Nature, red in tooth and claw." Timothy Morton argues that "Putting something called 'Nature' on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of Woman. It is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration" (5). However, that version of nature seems incompatible either with the immersive, embodied "feeling for nature" sought by Gairn's mountaineers, the yawning gulf of geologic time that terrified Tennyson, or the weird, ever-changing world of evolution via natural selection. Discussing the Victorians' fears about evolution in his *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism* (2011), Ashton Nichols writes, "What terrified them most seems to have been death pure and simple, all that earlier death that had to happen to allow a little bit of mature life to live" (181). Indeed, Morton's subsequent book *The Ecological Thought* (2010), makes frequent recourse to Darwin as a model of ecological thinking precisely because of the emphasis on instability and change throughout the *Origin of Species.* In this regard, the Victorians' conception of nature, society, and their interaction is a far more apt correlate to our own moment than is the more familiar Romantic "Nature." In the Anthropocene, nature is more likely to be an antibiotic resistant microbe, an invasive species, or a superstorm than a harmonious pastoral scene.

It is both appropriate and telling, then, that the entry for the Victorian era included in the recent *Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (2014) focuses not on rural Britain, exalted landscapes, or even "nature" per se, but rather on empire and disease. It is an insightful essay by Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee on Kipling and cholera, drawn from his new monograph *Natural Disasters and Victorian Empire: Famines, Fevers, and the Literary Cultures of South Asia* (2013). Mukherjee's book *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English* (2010) established him as a key figure in postcolonial ecocriticism, and *Natural Disasters and Victorian Empire* is poised to do the same within Victorian studies. As Mukherjee notes, "most of Queen Victoria's subjects and peoples and their cultures were not coterminous with England, although they remained significantly connected to it" (50). Mukherjee goes well beyond the now familiar refrain that nothing that occurred in the British Isles in the nineteenth century can be understood outside the imperial frame. Instead, he uses the term "Victorian" in an expansive sense "to absolutely insist on re-adjusting our perspective to a global scale without annulling the regional and local specificities" (50). In literary terms, "unyoking 'Victorian' from England will also mean expanding our received understandings of literary canons, forms and styles." Most notably, "the relationship between sickness, disease and representation can no longer entirely be subsumed under the sign of realism . . . [but] will be found in gothic short stories, memoirs, travelogues, bureaucratic romances and articulated through a host of mixed registers" (50). In medical terms, "it will also mean that in addition to the figures of the invalid and those who minister care for her, we also pay more detailed attention to the facts of the diseases themselves" (50). While framed here in terms of the medical humanities, all of these considerations dovetail explicitly with the ecocritical turn. Ecocritics, too, have insisted

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on a reevaluation of genre, especially in terms of attention to nonfiction. Ultimately, he argues that "to analyze the discourses of disastrous diseases is also to investigate the role of literature as a model of problematic reflection on the imperial quotidian" (50).

Mukherjee shows how attention to Victorian theories of disease, the unequal distribution of resources, and nineteenth-century understandings of climate come together to form a "common global ideology of disaster" (8). In so doing, he shows that Victorian ecocriticism will not be about "Nature" set apart from the human, but rather unearth the ecology of history as part and parcel of the human as both cultural and biological entity. That this arises not in the context of preserving an idealized nature but rather in the effort to sustain the ecology of human life is consistent both with the meaning of the term "environmentalism" in the Victorian era, when it referred to the doctrine that all organisms are affected by their environment and thus closer to "ecology" than its now familiar meaning of environmental advocacy, and to present concerns for environmental justice.

Mukherjee's book is also strategically presentist. It begins with Hurricane Katrina, offering a sustained theorization of the "refugee" crisis in denuded New Orleans. This comparison between a twenty-first century disaster and the nineteenth-century materials sets up Mukherjee's argument that we remain Victorian in profound ways, and perhaps never more so than in the encounter with extreme weather and its pathogenic aftermath. Attempting to understand the extent to which natural disasters are "natural," Mukherjee argues that the question "can be traced back to the fault-lines within the cultures of British imperialism," tracing the Victorian origins of "a common global ideology of disaster" (7–8). In the process, he draws an important distinction from Naomi Klein's thesis about "disaster capitalism," in which natural disasters provide opportunities for exploitation. Instead, Mukherjee argues that "modern capitalism does not opportunistically *follow* disaster events but is *co-terminal* with, and *constitutive* of, them" (10). One of his key claims in building this argument is that "disasters were not exceptional, chance events, but a permanent, prevailing condition in many parts of the world," most notably the tropics (8). This point seems only likely to gain force as the effects of global warming are manifest ever more visibly, painfully, and unevenly around the world: the discourse of perpetual disaster provides an all-too-ready reservoir of tropes for naturalizing the climate disasters to come.

The discourse of perpetual disaster is in turn used to justify what Mukherjee calls "palliative imperialism — the idea of imperialism as an act of care, in fact, a relief effort — undertaken in order to fulfill Europe's historic mission of rescuing the native inhabitants from their own habitat" (18). The moral justification of such intervention, which is perhaps most memorably encoded in Kipling's "fill full the mouth of Famine/ And bid the sickness cease," is of course predicated on the assumption that empire did not empty the famished mouth first, nor spread the sickness it now calls into abeyance. Highlighting this very problem is the reason that postcolonial critics have often been skeptical of any invocation of "nature" as almost invariably an occlusion of, if not outright apology for, historical iniquities. However, Mukherjee's argument is productive precisely because he refuses to take the easy route of simply rejecting the natural altogether. Citing Rob Nixon's theorization of "slow violence," Mukherjee writes that "the slow but inexorable loss of human and nonhuman lives, dignity, habitat, and livelihood have become a part of the natural lifecycle of historical modernity and capitalism" (12). That "natural" is both literal and figurative. It is figurative in that disaster and deprivation come to be viewed as the "natural" condition of certain regions, and literal in that the fate suffered is that of actual species, ecosystems, and communities.

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Such unnaturally-natural disasters offer a reminder that neither capitalism nor history can be understood outside the material conditions, networks of extraction, resources, energy flows by which they are sustained. Meanwhile, the ubiquity of such disasters becomes symptomatic of the ecological limits of imperial capitalism. In other words, empire needs to present natural disasters as endemic to certain regions because its own operations render natural disaster inevitable. Such dialectical oscillation lies at the heart of Mukherjee's analysis and is what separates it from either glib social constructionism (common in postcolonial studies) on the one hand or a retrenched defense of nature (common in ecocriticism) on the other.

The arc of Mukherjee's book analyzes a series of colonial writers — Emily Eden, Fanny Parks, Philip Meadows Taylor, Flora Annie Steel, Rudyard Kipling — as they respond to Indian famines and epidemics. This scope includes fiction and nonfiction, travelers with varying degrees of experience with the Indian subcontinent, and, in Meadows Taylor, a colonial official responsible for coordinating the government response to a major famine himself. Over and against these colonial writers, Mukherjee shows how Indians wrote within the discourse of disaster but profoundly re-cast it: "large numbers of them across various class and caste configurations imagined colonialism and empire *as* natural disasters of hitherto unimaginable scale" (23).

One of the most interesting discussions in the book focuses on palliative imperialism's internal critiques. In formulating responses to each successive famine or epidemic, imperial officials analyzed and critiqued their predecessors' actions, sometimes harshly. However, within the imperial archive, such critiques create an idea of the perfectibility of palliative intervention: "one consistent strategy of the administrative narratives of 'tropical disasters' was to provide evidence of progress by simultaneously detecting and consigning failures of governance to a past which [was] then designated as pre-modern" (67). This line of argument, then, becomes one in favor of "modern" methods, rather than an attack on empire as such. Rather than undermining the fundamental concept of palliative empire, such internal critiques ultimately make it far more durable because critique itself is thus incorporated among its operative mechanisms. As Mukherjee explains, "this contradictory way of thinking about disaster events — as simultaneously pre-modern and modern, and modernity itself as being located both in the present and in some significant moments of the past, should be seen as the primary textual condition of British imperialism" (67). This, in turn, opens one of the numerous connections between Mukherjee's account of palliative empire and subsequent international developments, in which repudiation of the "white man's burden" has become a justifying gesture rather than an apology.

Mukherjee's book makes important interventions within ecocriticism, both in its own arguments and in its reframing of the archives of inquiry. He argues that "literature's generically productive and mutative relationship with disaster events seems to require a corresponding expansion in those theories of literature that concern themselves with the relationship between writing and the 'natural' environment as such" (16). He critiques both the Euro-American focus of early ecocriticism as well as its reification of nature and descriptive realism as the genre offering best access to it. Reprising the argument of his *Postcolonial Environments*, he contends that "environmental toxicity and degradation may be taken to be the defining condition of today's postcolonial world" and frames his current project in terms of tracing "some lineages of this postcolonial predicament by looking at colonial and imperial South Asia" (17).

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Mukherjee does a fabulous job showing the ways in which the environmental and medical humanities dovetail with postcolonial studies, especially as it is informed by Marxist materialism. Critics apt to turn squeamish at any invocation of nature or biology as factors in historical processes would do well to attend to Mukherjee's arguments, which uncover the ways in which biological and cultural history emerge out of shared processes, and dramatize the fact that attending to the "natural" in "natural disaster" in no way blunts the instruments of cultural critique. In the process, he in some measure refutes (though never setting out do so explicitly) Dipesh Chakrabarty's claim that "all my readings in theories of globalization, Marxist analysis of capital, subaltern studies, and postcolonial criticism . . . had not really prepared me for making sense of this planetary conjuncture within which humanity finds itself today," most notably climate change (199). Mukherjee thus emerges as a kind of diplomat, negotiating a settlement between ecocriticism and postcolonial studies over how to account for famine, disease, and natural disaster in Victorian India. This adroit diplomacy is both the book's great strength and, perhaps, also a weakness insofar as the seamless integration of fields that might otherwise be at odds left me wondering about the disjuncture articulated by Chakrabarty. Isn't there some point at which an ecocritical perspective finds itself in tension with a postcolonial one? It would appear that Mukherjee's answer is no. This is not only promising for the ongoing integration of two academic fields but also, far more importantly, suggests that the twin evils of ecological devastation and global inequity are both manifestations of a shared problem, and thus might find a shared solution.

One of Mukherjee's most important interventions is his insistence on a resolutely global understanding of what it means to be "Victorian." This occurs both within his account of the nineteenth century and in terms of the way he draws on the archives of Victorian imperialism to understand the present. Colonial writers attempted to reconcile themselves to the fact that India was *not* stuck in the past, that famine and disease were not holdovers from a pre-civilized age but rather the products of imperial modernity. Describing Emily Eden's account of her travels around India during the famine of 1837–38 with her brother (who was Governor General of India at the time), Mukherjee writes: "Even as she shrilly defends the blessings conferred on India by her brother's administration, Emily hints that the death, decay and the destruction of social fabric in India were *historical* problems" (76). And these historical problems trouble her efforts to provide a literary solution: "Stylistically, her troubled imaginations about the empire of death cannot be accommodated within the norms of the picturesque. . . . India, seen through this lens, cannot quite be sealed off within the ruined realm of the glorious past nor within the entombed otherness of perpetual death. Rather, its skeletal presence signals an uneasy awareness of its coevality with Britain in a modernity that emerges as the dark beating heart of empire" (76). Meanwhile, cholera — "the archetypical tropical disease" — was also an all too familiar plague in London (142). However much Victorian depictions insisted on its "Asiatic" origins, epidemic disease had become well ensconced as a feature of metropolitan existence. If the tropics were a space of perpetual disaster, so too was the imperial metropolis. This is not a line of thought to which Mukherjee devotes very much attention. In his discussion of Kipling, he offers an astute analysis of the way that imperial medical writing on cholera "with its emphasis on voiding, shriveling, shrinking, leaking, coldness and putrefaction, directly overlapped with and contributed to the development of the late nineteenth-century gothic discourse," as manifest in *Dracula, Jekyll and Hyde*, and *The Beetle* (144). What he doesn't say explicitly is that those examples are all set in London. This connection seems ripe for further inquiry,

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especially given that the Victorian patterns of urbanization have now "gone global" on what Mike Davis refers to as the "planet of slums." I for one would be eager to read a study building on Mukherjee's work in terms of the Victorian legacy of urbanization in the Global South.

Mukherjee's book will be of interest to Victorianists not only because it recasts the Victorian period within a global frame, but also because it refigures the relationship between the Victorian era and our own. His argument is at once historical and historiographical, an experiment in how an ecological history of empire might be written. As Mukherjee explains: "writers, administrators, bureaucrats, journalists, anti-colonial and anti-imperial activists, all intermittently suggested that it was the very material structures of Victorian imperialism — a rapidly globalizing capitalism and the processes of modernization it generated — that lay at the heart of cataclysmic disaster events. This consciousness, which we too readily take to be a contemporary one, is also a Victorian gift we have inherited. Perhaps the periodizing markers of "post-" or "after-" mischaracterizes our relationship to the Victorians. Perhaps we both belong to a singular but uneven modernity that is characterized by a permanent, if differentiated, disaster environment that constantly demands an appropriately urgent writing from us" (28). After reading the book, it is only "perhaps" that seems dubious.

The expansive timescale of the Anthropocene, which dovetails with the global reach of Mukherjee's conception of "Victorian," comes to the fore in Allen MacDuffie's marvelous *Victorian Literature, Energy, and the Ecological Imagination* (2014). MacDuffie opens by analyzing a recent Chevron advertisement, in which the need for energy will be met by tapping "the greatest source of energy in the world — ourselves." Thus, shortage of physical energy of the kind that powers cities and light bulbs will be addressed by human energy in the form of creativity and innovation (the kind that powers metaphorical light bulbs). As MacDuffie argues, "In this space of verbal and visual fantasy, the thermodynamic problem of the irreversible transformation of energy is solved by means of the linguistic and visual transformation of "energy" (2). MacDuffie then turns from this contemporary sleight of hand (and the crises it seeks both to conjure and to dispel), to its prehistory in Victorian debates over the "coal question" (which is to say, "will the coal run out?"), anxieties about natural limits to human civilization such as those raised by Malthus, and the science of thermodynamics. A key work in Victorian studies, ecocriticism, and the energy humanities, MacDuffie's book models just how productive an intersection that can be, and just how energizing scholarship can be. Construing society in terms of an energy regime, enabled and pervaded by fossil fuels, reveals "deep structural continuities between the Victorian period and our own" (19). MacDuffie's project becomes less tracing the prehistory of contemporary debates than pointing to the fact that the Victorian era and our own are now bound up together in the Anthropocene. Thus, he explains, "While I am interested in excavating the various ways in which energy was mystified and misperceived by the Victorians, I do so not to 'find fault' with a blinkered worldview, but to suggest that the difficulties in coming to terms with natural limits and unsustainable practices persist, and that, on some level, their myths are our own" (22).

The core of MacDuffie's book is a learned and deeply researched understanding of Victorian thermodynamics, both in terms of nineteenth-century scientific debates and the broader cultural discourses and anxieties adjacent to them. In recounting these, he reaffirms one of the central tenets of what I am calling strategic presentism: it only works if you are right in your analysis of the past. The point is not so much to map present concerns backward, as to defamiliarize the present by way of the alterity of the past. In this respect, strategic

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presentism is *strategic* precisely because it is historically rigorous, even as it is explicit about the fact that its ultimate aim is to utilize the study of history as a means to intervene in present affairs. In this case, MacDuffie is able to make graceful (and forceful) reflections on contemporary energy issues because of how tightly those observations dovetail with his extensive historical research.

The first section of the book is comprised of two lengthy chapters organized around the first and second laws of thermodynamics: that energy can neither be created nor destroyed, and that energy spontaneously flows from being concentrated to being diffuse–the latter constituting the much discussed and often misunderstood principle of entropy. MacDuffie brings together Victorian writing about coal, urbanization, and anxiety about the death of the sun. He quotes T. H. Huxley's remarkable essay on "The Formation of Coal," and makes clear how aware the Victorians were that *all* energy, even that sequestered in coal, was ultimately solar, but also the ways in which this very insight led many observers (Huxley included) to seemingly conflate one with the other, losing sight of the fact that while solar energy is "essentially limitless" the supply of fossil fuels is anything but. Huxley describes in great detail the process whereby solar energy is stored up in plants and ultimately sequestered into coal, without addressing the radical difference in timescale between that process and the rate of extraction "determined by history, subject to the technological capacities and demands of human civilization" (27). In other words, nature *does* renew fossil fuel deposits, but not at a rate that makes that renewal relevant to questions of its utilization by humans. "Even in the hands of 'Darwin's bulldog,' an agnostic materialist, and (elsewhere) bracing critic of anthropocentric thinking, fossil-fuel energy is subject to a mystifying, metaphysical faith in the perfect 'economy' of the natural order," namely the idea that "nature never wastes anything" (27). MacDuffie then traces this "cognitive dissonance . . . in the attempt to square the new world of fossil-fuel resources with the circle — or cycle — of a balanced natural economy" (27). He argues that "the clash of these two distinct energy paradigms, and the way the development of the concept of energy in the nineteenth century — which resulted, finally, in its modern thermodynamic definition, as a measure of work — served both to create and obscure this crucial distinction" (27).

One of the particularly interesting threads of this discussion hinges on the way it "naturalized industry" because if "all forms of energy were interconnected and indestructible, then it seemed impossible to draw firm distinctions between the operations of industry and those of nature" (34). In this regard, the Victorians already seem to be practicing something strikingly close to recent efforts to develop models of ecological thinking (à la Timothy Morton and others) not dependent on a reified conception of "Nature" like the one for which Romantic ecocriticism has recently been roundly criticized. At other points, the idea of nature as "cosmic abstraction . . . rather than terrestrial environment or material ecosystem" returns, but in ways that are patently not disrupted by the intrusion of "industry" per se (40). In this regard, the Victorians already seem to be wrestling with (and thus provide useful insights for) the challenge of how to articulate human impact on the environment in specific, tangible, material ways. One of the key dimensions of this challenge is time. "Obscured in the emphasis on this raw, unifying cosmic agency are the divergent temporalities at play; the easy syntactic balance of a phrase like 'He builds a forest and hews it down' conceals the deeper mismatch between the chronologies of building and hewing . . . the development of a forest, may take thousands of years; the second can be accomplished in weeks or months, but the sense of easy transformability levels such crucial ecological distinctions" (41).

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The depletion of fossil fuel resources was not lost on the Victorians entirely, however. It returns with a vengeance in the "coal question" as "London's massive, ever-increasing coal consumption was invariably singled out as a focus for grave concern, and fashioned as a potent synecdoche for the nation's energy consumption habits" (49). William Stanley Jevons's book *The Coal Question* (1865) dubbed coal "the source of civilization" and worried that it was running out. As MacDuffie illustrates, anxiety about coal consumption was indelibly aligned with urbanization, in such a way that the city came to reflect a parasitic entity that might overthrow even the balanced economy of nature. For me, one of the useful implications of this discussion is the light it sheds on Victorian concern about the eventual death of the sun. While mid-Victorian anxiety that the sun would eventually burn up is well known, it has always struck me as odd that many people would be all that worried about an event projected to occur billions of years in the future. However, in MacDuffie's analysis, that almost metaphysical concern provides the backdrop for far more literal (and immediate) problems: the impossibility of building a genuinely efficient steam-engine, the waste of coal, and the resultant threat that the "source of civilization" would become exhausted. Such an ecological vision makes it far more credible that the death of the sun would become a potent symbol of a complex nexus of concerns, rather than their sole origin. After all, an ever-increasing number of Victorian Britons lived in cities whose smoke-filled skies had *already* obliterated the sun.

The remainder of the book offers in-depth analyses of a series of canonical Victorian authors, beginning with chapters on Dickens's *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*. In addition to attending to the places where Dickens speaks directly to concerns about energy, MacDuffie also traces its currents through the novels' form, noting that "energy" is one of the most ubiquitous critical descriptors of Dickens's style, and pointing out the ways in which it animates even nominally inanimate objects. MacDuffie's reading of *Bleak House* focuses on the way in which Chancery emerges as "a resource-intensive system" (91), noting that images such as the Megalosaurus that waddles up Holborn hill enact "the curious temporal collapse at work in fossil-fuel consumption" since "the sprawling growth of Victorian London is quite literally emerging from the sunlight of the Mesozoic" (93), thus becoming the "spectral imprint of an earlier era" (94). However, MacDuffie also shows how energy concerns become formalized at the level of the novel's plot. Indeed, MacDuffie finds "one of Dickens's most significant ecological insights" in, of all people, Skimpole, whose "self-justifying fictions" transform material loss into fictional gain, in a model that is followed to disaster by Richard Carstone (100). The "Skimpolian school of economics" would seem "an exaggeration on Dickens's part, except that we have already seen on the streets of London the mismatch between fantasies of limitless growth and the pressing limits of the actual environment" (101). Richard's narrative encapsulates what MacDuffie calls an "*unsustainable fiction*; that is, the story he tells himself (and Esther) undermines the very conditions that story requires in order to continue being told" (101).

Shifting from the internal "fictions" of individual characters to the novel as a whole, MacDuffie traces the way that Dickens seeks to contain the implications of waste, entropy, and ecological withering that he has so presciently dramatized. "Dickens's fictions and Victorian thermodynamics, despite their ecological and ideological differences . . . find a kind of common ground in the notion that even waste can be fully accounted for in some representational schema, and thus *translated* into something else" (107). Indeed, I would argue that it is through the work of such "translation" that Dickens's prose acquires much

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of its aforementioned "energy," as though the inevitable entropic loss at each transformation is recouped as aesthetic effect. Ultimately, as "the walls close in, and the sense of an ordered design becomes more apparent, the narrative's treatment of sustainability undergoes a corresponding transformation" (110). Tying up all the "loose ends," MacDuffie argues, "has the effect of implicitly de-pressuring the population question" as "an overwhelming sea of people turns out to be a large, but manageable network" so that the novel "turns an overwhelming excess into a reassuringly circumscribed plentitude" (112).

This latter, potentially reassuring, turn finds its clearest articulation in MacDuffie's reading of the "renewable energies" of *Our Mutual Friend*, wherein Dickens extends his commitment to language as an "agency of transformation: it can turn water into fire, make the inert vital, and return the dead to life" (115). In the process, MacDuffie argues that *Our Mutual Friend* "focuses not just on the personal and collective warping effects of a resources-exploiting cultural order, but on the various attempts of characters to reflect upon the place of human life in such an order, and to find meaning in a world defined by an inescapable economy of energy relations" (115). Drawing on the thermodynamic articulation of energy as measurable "work," MacDuffie points to Edwin Chadwick as an important interlocutor for Dickens's novel not only in his more familiar role of sanitation pioneer but rather as an emblematic figure in the turn to understanding the energy (and agency) of any living body as one unit within a broader energy regime comprised of often nonliving bodies, a turn most familiar in the description of engines' "horsepower." As MacDuffie explains, "Once energy could be described as a quantity, it became a routine gesture to frame the individual as part of a vast, aggregated energy regime" (118). That turn to aggregation, meanwhile, becomes the central feature of environmental thinking: "Chadwick's thinking — blinkered as it is — also represents the stirrings of some kind of environmental consciousness, the understanding that one's own actions contribute in their small way to the larger system in which everyone has to live. In order to imagine that connection, and to have it influence one's own behaviors, one must, on some level, necessarily imagine oneself as a resource-consuming, pollution-producing unit. Counter-intuitive as it might sound, environmental consciousness *is*, in some ways, a quantitative consciousness" (135). One can see, in the repeated qualifiers sprinkled throughout those sentences, MacDuffie's almost apologetic hesitation about appearing to hold Edwin Chadwick up as a model of environmental thinking. However, it seems to me that such moments, in which we recognize the insights buried in otherwise discarded or misguided theories and frameworks, are in fact one of the most valuable payoffs of historical inquiry and its relevance for our own — still blinkered — attempts to move beyond the fossilized existence that we share with the Victorians.

MacDuffie's strongest chapter may be his analysis of John Ruskin, whose work he calls "the most profound meditation on an emergent energy intensive culture in the Victorian period" (137). The Ruskin chapter cuts across the vast body of his work, drawing a remarkable coherence out of an oeuvre that often seems not only idiosyncratic but indeed contradictory and uneven. MacDuffie notes that, for Ruskin, "energy" becomes "a capacious signifier" that "focuses on the transformational junctures that unite seemingly disparate phenomena and modes of human behavior" (138). This preoccupation, MacDuffie argues, runs throughout Ruskin's corpus: "what appears first as a network of relations comes, in his late writings, to look more like a feedback loop or spiral into irreversible climate chaos: degraded environment producing degraded tastes producing degraded consumer choices producing a degraded world" (138). The great strength of MacDuffie's analysis is the way he draws this conclusion

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out of the range of Ruskin's writings, rather than focusing only on his explicitly ecological turn as these concerns flower forth in the agonized weirdness of *The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century.* For example, he argues that "for Ruskin, culture is an economy of energy. Everything that is produced depends on a common stock of resources, but exactly *what* is produced — food, furniture, stained-glass windows, or explosives — depends upon aesthetic ideals, cultural demands, and habits of consumption. He attempts to maintain a stable field of aesthetic reference against which all acts of production should be judged. Like Marx, Ruskin sees culture as an expression of the material conditions of production; unlike Marx, however, he believes culture has the potential to exert a powerful shaping influence over those conditions" (145). This provides a substantive and necessary qualifier to Hess's critique of Ruskin's articulation of Wordsworthian "Nature" on the grounds that it was aesthetic and cultural *rather than* ecological. In so doing, Hess seemingly sets ecology and aesthetics at odds, implying that it would have been possible to be ecological rather than aesthetic. MacDuffie's Ruskin is both more coherent and more ecologically promising precisely because he attends to the "shaping influence" of the aesthetic as a feature of *any* ecological vision, rather than attempting to bracket it off as inherently flawed. The aesthetic does not replace the ecological — MacDuffie reminds us that natural resources are not commodities like any other but rather "the *basis* of all other commodities" (151). Rather the ecological provides the basis for the aesthetic (as in Ruskin's attention to the material properties of stone), while the aesthetic serves to guide to appropriate action. This trajectory is, as Hess shows, fraught with elitism, contradiction, and plenty of scientific misunderstanding. Ruskin refuses to grant that diphtheria or cholera is "natural as song," a formulation the surely-he-can't-be-serious strangeness of which seems to undo the very stability of "nature" on which he claims to insist (162). And yet it is for that very reason, that Ruskin's work (like that of many Victorian thinkers) becomes useful for the attempt to reconcile ourselves to the Anthropocene, an age in which "nature" can only be imagined as at once absent and bigger than we are.

MacDuffie reads *Jekyll and Hyde* as a "fantasy of reversibility" — in effect a negation of entropy — that dramatizes the tension between "what one wants to believe about oneself and what one has to ignore in order to do so" (196). As such, it becomes a parable of sorts for a society dependent on the conversion of energy from one form into another at great, irrevocable, but unmentionable loss. He carries this analysis of Victorian energy forms into the imperial context in an excellent chapter on Conrad, in which the Conrad's juxtaposition of the city and the jungle shows us "energy raw versus energy cooked" (198). *The Secret Agent*'s London, which Conrad himself described as "devourer of the world's light" appears as a "parasite on the world economic system" (199). Drawing on sociologist Stephen Bunker's influential theory of energy transfers in development, in which energy is extracted from colonies or so-called "developing" regions and transferred to the metropolitan center, MacDuffie argues that the description of a colony as a "dependency gets it exactly backward" (200). However, one of his most astute lines of argument focuses on Conrad's attention to the waste and entropy *within* the imperial system. Contra Marlow's claim that "what saves us is efficiency," MacDuffie argues that "Europe's devotion is not to efficiency but to 'efficiency,'" and it is belied at every turn in Conrad's oeuvre (201). Instead, entropy becomes "the secret denied by the rhetoric of imperial civilization, but working everywhere to undermine its pretensions to advancing order, progress, and prosperity" (222). From Conrad, MacDuffie turns to H. G. Wells, whom he contrasts with physiologist Henry Maudsley. One

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of the especially productive aspects of this discussion is the way that Maudlsey's theory, particularly as it pertains to urban degeneration, also comes to reflect an awareness of what we would now call environmental health. Indeed, as is also evident in MacDuffie's analysis of Chadwick, one of the real payoffs of this kind of inquiry is the ways in which it can reveal the unexpected insights within discredited ideas. Nonetheless, Maudsley ultimately offers MacDuffie a foil for Wells, as his nominally "evolutionary" model is discredited on two fronts. The first, that it reifies the urban poor as "a different species," is familiar to Victorianists, but the second is both more surprising, and seems in many respects at odds with the underlying assumptions of degeneration theory (227) — namely, when Maudsley extends his view into the evolutionary future he cannot imagine that future without human beings. One of the core differences that MacDuffie sees between Maudsley and Wells hinges on this very point: where *The Time Machine* makes the idea of extinction (and specifically human extinction) "fully believable and imaginable" (242), "Maudsley imagines that when the sun starts to die out millions of years in the future, there will still be human beings standing around to watch it happen" (241) because "for Maudsley, 'life' means human life" (242).

Whereas *The Time Machine* ultimately imagines extinction and inevitable civilizational decline, Wells's less-read novel *The World Set Free* (1915) resolves this problem with a turn to the seemingly limitless potential of nuclear energy. Thus, Wells "redefines the concept of degeneration, converting it from a biological into a socio-historical signifier" (248). It is the system that "degenerates" in the nineteenth century, not the species. As MacDuffie explains, museum visitors in the novel are astonished by the "extravagant filthiness of fossil-fuel-driven machines. . . . Pollution, it turns out, was not a product of energy-intensive processes, it was a product of *coal*. Like degeneration, resource scarcity, and other Victorian-era problems, waste is a relic of a benighted era, conquered through techno-evolution. To imagine pollution as a uniquely Victorian signifier is to quarantine it historically, and to imagine that the period's lessons about energy waste and environmental devastation simply do not apply to the new epoch" (249). If Wells's optimism sounds all too familiar, not only in terms of nuclear power (which does, after all, produce waste), but also of the shift to the ostensibly non-extractive digital economy, so too does the casual dismissal of the "benighted" past that it entails. In the context of a work of literary-historical analysis such moments inevitably take on a dimension of meta-commentary. Like Mukherjee's articulation of what E. P. Thompson called the "enormous condescension of posterity" in palliative imperialism's internal critiques, dramatizing the inadequacy of such turns is an integral part of the historical imagination and, more particularly, of the potential for that inquiry to help defamiliarize the present at the heart of a strategically presentist reading practice.

In different ways, these three books point to the promise of Victorian ecocriticism. Hess's critique articulates the need to move definitively beyond "Romantic ecocriticism" in ways that will be particularly conducive to Victorian studies. For example, what genre could be better adapted to articulating an ecological vision of everyday life (as opposed to sublime refuge) than the realist novel? Speaking of adaptation, the fact that the intersection of literature and science has long been one of the most influential arenas of Victorian studies provides a rich theoretical, historical, and methodological archive for work that will be both significant for our understanding of the Victorian era and absolutely vital for the ongoing development of the environmental humanities as a whole. Indeed, one of the critiques that has sometimes been leveled against ecocriticism is an overly naïve (or metaphorical) view of the

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science of ecology, something Victorianist scholarship already has the methodological tools to correct. Mukherjee's book not only expands the definition of "Victorian" from a national to a planetary designation, but also unequivocally reorients the frame toward human ecology and points to the overlap between the environmental and medical humanities. Treating a lineup of extremely canonical authors, MacDuffie shows both how integral ecological issues were to the literature of the period and how transformative the intersection between the history of science and ecocriticism can be. All three of these books of them also help elaborate the project of strategic presentism, explicitly framing their interventions in terms of contemporary ecological crisis and environmental debate, from Chevron commercials (MacDuffie) to the ecological impacts of writing on a new laptop (Hess) to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Mukherjee). At the same time, each also demonstrates that such interventions become effective only when they are attentive to the particularities of the past in order to use it as a vantage point from which to understand the present, rather than simply mapping present terms backward. Strategic presentism demands a dialectical (or what Edward Said called "contrapuntal") movement between the urgent concerns of the present and the long, arduous work of scholarship. Neither of these commitments can be allowed to trump the other.

I am by no means suggesting that we should pursue only those scholarly inquiries that seem most relevant to the present, or that we should be hasty in our analysis. Either would simply do away with the "scholarly" part, and thus vitiate our own distinctive contribution. Strategic presentism elevates the urgency of diligent scholarship precisely by calling on it to account for the demands of the moment, but it also exposes the vastly different shelf life between our objects of study, the time it takes to do good scholarship, and public discourse. Scholarship takes time. As the books discussed above illustrate, good scholarship requires precisely the kind of sifting and winnowing, slow reading, minute observation, and archival diligence for which the public sphere at large has no patience. Hence, the *strategic* part of strategic presentism refers to the fact that we must be strategic about how, when, and where we give our archives voice amidst the ephemeral, ever-accelerating, ever-forgetful frenzy of the present. This might entail hybrid projects that contain both "public" and "academic" components, employing the strategic use of blogs and other short-form writing alongside the established genres of academic monographs and journal articles. Indeed, the newly initiated "V21 Collective" (http://v21collective.org) is experimenting with precisely such initiatives. Regardless of the form, if more of us start to do this kind of work, and to express it in more venues and to more audiences, the myriad crises of the present may turn out to be the strongest argument for the ongoing relevance of the humanities in the twenty-first century.

University of Washington

NOTES

1. The absence of Victorian ecocriticism is (of course) an exaggeration: for example, Lawrence Buell devotes part of a chapter to Dickens in *Writing for an Endangered World,* while Thomas Hardy is a touchstone for Bate's *Song of the Earth.* Furthermore, environmental historians have been more attentive to the era: James Winter's *Secure From Rash Assault: Sustaining the Victorian Environment* (1999) offers a useful discussion of both Victorian efforts in nature conservation and the idea of environmentalism

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in the period, when the term referred not to concern about the state of the natural world but rather the idea that organisms (and indeed cultures) are affected by their environments. Other notable examples include Peter Thorsheim's *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain Since 1800* (2006); William M. Taylor's *The Vital Landscape: Nature and the Built Environment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (2004); and John M. MacKenzie's *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation, and British Imperialism* (1997). These works (among others) reveal extensive debates not only about the status of nature in the Victorian era, but also explicit awareness of environmental vulnerability and attempts to address it, whether through conservation in the form of national parks, smoke-abatement and pollution-control efforts, or the creation of artificial environments to protect plants from the toxic ecologies of industry.

2. Paul Crutzen dates the Anthropocene to 1784, when "analyses of air trapped in polar ice showed the beginning of growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane" a date that "also happens to coincide with James Watt's design of the steam engine" (23). Others have proposed the invention of agriculture, the instrumentalization of fire, or the nuclear bomb as potential points of origin. There are various reasons for choosing one date versus another, but Crutzen's remains the most widely cited given that he is usually credited with coining the term. For good discussions of the idea of the Anthropocene, see Tobias Boes and Kate Marshall, "Writing the Anthropocene: An Introduction" and Rob Nixon "The Anthropocene: The Promise and Pitfalls of an Epochal Idea."

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